"Living Other-Wise": The Bushmen Farming Network as an Example of "Alter-Native" Counter Practices to Agriculture and Development

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The contemporary global development agenda continues to be informed by the premises and promises of modernization (Weber 2007, 2015; Spann 2014). These premises are accepted and reproduced implicitly by many actors across numerous everyday contexts and explicitly by international development agencies and national governments. Especially evident is the idea that cultures and societies are or should be moving toward an "ideal type" and away from "tradition," which is seen to hold people back (Rostow 1960). Such thinking is generally also prevalent in development policies in Melanesia and elsewhere in the Pacific, where the foundations of modernization theory—that development is a lengthy, progressive, systematic, and phased process whereby societies move through stages of growth from the traditional to the modern—still carry a great deal of weight. As Eric Waddell and John Connell argued, the assumptions that underpin modernization theory play a major role in development thinking and practice in the Pacific (2007, 2). In this context, it is not hard to see that concern with identifying which practices and social relations belong in the modern world—particularly those associated with economic development and agricultural modernization—informed remarks made in August 2015 by Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. Speaking about the need to reform customary land management in order for land to be more attractive for investment, Sogavare stated:

> As Solomon Islanders living in the 21st Century, we have a real challenge in our hands. We must be careful not to go to the extreme in idolising our customary practices that are clearly repugnant to the ideals of development. (*Solomon Star* 2015)

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Underpinning such remarks is an emphasis on individual economic self-interest and "possessive individualism" (C B Macpherson 1962). Such an emphasis frames people and communities who do not exemplify an "ideal market type" as anachronisms, failures, and barriers to development. Being viewed as a barrier to development is certainly the case with some rural Melanesian communities who are more concerned with the organization of nonmarket social relations than with individual material improvement (Curry 1999; Curry and Koczberski 2013; Mosko 2013). The notion that development will transform rural Melanesian communities by establishing individual market relations of production and exchange is also highly political because it privileges a certain epistemology and associated practices. As a consequence, dimensions of Melanesian personhood that, for instance, emphasize sharing, obligation, and reciprocity along extended networks of kinship groupings (McDonald 2014, 35; Curry and Koczberski 2012, 380, 388) are devalued and considered "obstacles" to development. This framing of these relations is therefore highly ideological (LiPuma 1998, 75). It posits a world of "atomistic individuals who are bound together only through market forces[, with] people . . . reduced to isolated creatures of the marketplace, devoid of . . . social relationships beyond simple market exchanges" (Brohman 1995, 297).[1]

Aspects of possessive individualism do increasingly inform parts of people's lives throughout both rural and urban Melanesia (Martin 2007; Sykes 2007; Taylor 2015), but relations of sharing, obligation, and reciprocity are still central to identity formation and, importantly, to how development is received by some communities (Curry and Koczberski 2013, 344). These more cooperative ways of relating—often absent from conventional narratives of development or considered merely as obstacles to be overcome—play an important part in the small-scale agricultural production on which the majority of rural people in Solomon Islands, for instance, depend (FAO 2008, 7).[2] As Jagjit Plahe, Shona Hawkes, and Sunil Ponnamperuma maintained, these culturally oriented relations are deeply embedded in many smallholder agricultural practices in the Pacific, even though the practices are under pressure from the commercialization of food regimes (2013, 320). In short, thick relations of cooperation and communal land management for sustainable food consumption still exist and have not yet been rendered obsolete by externally imposed economic forces. This demonstrates that differing practices, values, and social relations still play an influential role in the lives of many people in countries like Solomon Islands. Moreover, their persistence illustrates

that by drawing on indigenous epistemology, registers of value, and what might be termed relations "other-wise" (Shilliam 2015, 7), Melanesians have created "alter-natives," which, as Tarcisius Kabutaulaka has written, "are rooted in centuries of traditions while at the same time adapting to new and dynamic futures that draw from within Melanesia and beyond" (2015, 126). However, while Kabutaulaka used the term "alter-native" to question a broader politics of representation, I use it here to focus on mostly agricultural practices that are being improved on by embedding them in local specifics.

One group working toward "development other-wise" is the Bushmen Farming Network (BFN) of Malaita, Solomon Islands. This fledgling group, which formed in 2012 and registered as a formal charity in 2013, has a membership of about one hundred farmers and can be seen as a response to contradictions and failures of the wider development project. The reasoning behind the establishment of the group was that, in the group of small villages in Central Kwara'ae from which the BFN first emerged, higher levels of stress related to food provisioning were being experienced due to decreasing yields and increased population pressures on customary land. This might seem to suggest the BFN is a narrow yield-driven response to food-provisioning concerns. However, tied into the reasoning behind the BFN's establishment were also concerns about the growing influence of nonlocal food sources as well as attempts to revive and retain some of the kastom practices associated with smallholder agriculture. This being the case, the BFN's establishment arose from a search for locally driven solutions to three pressing issues: the exhaustion of soil through the shortening of fallow periods, a growing reliance on nonlocal food sources, and the upholding and reinvigoration of falafala (custom) through smallholder agriculture.[3]

From these issues emerged the broad aims of the BFN: improving soil quality through locally devised and tested alternative agricultural practices; reintroducing local foods like taro, yam, and pana (arrowroot); and reinvigorating aspects of falafala in order to assist the first two aims. Soon after its inception in Central Kwara'ae, a northern chapter was formed in Fo'ondo in the To'abaita region. Later, in 2014, World Vision began to utilize the group for a soil-management project in South Malaita.

As a registered charity, the BFN does seemingly have a formal structure, with a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. However, such formalities might convey a false impression of its operational structure; actually, "anyone can be a Bushmen," as Casper Saefo'oa, one of the

founding members and president of the BFN, explained one afternoon at his house in the village of Fulifo'oa (author fieldnotes, July 2015). Thus, while an initial demonstration garden is usually put in a plot looked after by a respected member of an interested village (for instance, an elder, a priest, or an experienced agriculturalist), anyone can help dig the demonstration garden, attend the ensuing training sessions, and take the ideas and use them in their own gardens. In turn, they can also help disseminate related knowledge. Thus, it is possible for someone to be a "Bushmen" without ever having met any of the "formal" core of the BFN in Central Kwara'ae. As Saefo'oa explained, "I was at the market in Auki and I was wearing my Bushmen cap. This man from South told me he was also a Bushmen. I asked him if he was from one of the communities in South Malaita I worked in. He said he wasn't but had visited Walande village to see relatives and saw how well the gardens were producing and thought he would have a try" (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016).

This kind of "having a try" fits with the aim of the Bushmen to have locally devised and tested alternative agricultural methods and also demonstrates that people pick and choose what they want from the BFN's methods and aims. Having freedom of choice may mean that not all of the same aims are shared by Bushmen Farmers across different locations. Moreover, in places where fertile soil is more abundant, there are fewer uptakes of some of the soil-specific methods. There has also been some local disdain expressed toward the Bushmen. In one instance, people in Central Kwara'ae referred to the Bushmen as the "farmers who ate rubbish," since they used food scraps and other organic matter on their gardens. A local from the village of Namobaula in Central Kwara'ae also questioned Bushmen's methods, suggesting that "it might work well but it takes too long to prepare the gardens. It is not worth the effort and the young people do not want to hear about falafala. They can just go up and slash and burn, plant and make some easier money when they sell at the markets" (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016).

With such localized issues of practice and responsiveness, it may seem a little strange to think of a group of about a hundred farmers in a province of a small Melanesian country as an example of contestation to a principal mode of global organization as well as a practice of "alter-development." However, as this article suggests, this contestation and practicing alter-development becomes clearer in the context of growing local concerns over food (in)security, nutrition, and food price hikes, as well as social and cultural erosion, which some within local communities per-

ceive as a potentially serious problem. Moreover, the awareness by "critical villagers" like the BFN offers an interesting response to sustainable development;[4] their approach offers both practitioners and policy makers an example of how sustainable development can actually be achieved by drawing on relations that are constitutive of indigenous registers of value in projects.

I develop my argument as follows. I begin by outlining some of the contradictions of the global development project in order to better examine the reasons for the emergence of a group like the BFN. Specifically, I draw attention to the increasing pressure on customary land and issues surrounding food (in)security and nutrition in light of a growing dependence on the global market, especially in relation to the consumption and production of food. I do so to illustrate how rural Solomon Islanders live a fulfilling lifestyle because and not in spite of their semi-subsistence economy, customary land tenure, and registers of value. In other words, indigenous knowledge and practices "generate significant value in terms of emotional well-being and satisfaction for individuals and communities" (Curry and Koczberski 2012, 379), as land and livelihoods are embedded in political, economic, ecological, and cultural constellations of interrelated social relations (Purdie 1999, 66). Moreover, the continuation of community-oriented and cultural values illustrates two things: First, it emphasizes the resilience of such values and practices associated with them. Second, epistemologically and politically speaking, this continuation also highlights how the "living knowledge traditions" of colonized peoples, although often devalued in development rhetoric, have "retained a tenacious thread of vitality that provides for the possibility of a retrieval of thought and action that addresses global injustices in ways other-wise" to that proffered by the dominant approaches (Shilliam 2015, 7). However, as I show, tensions emerge as some members of communities attempt to adapt and hold onto these thick values and relations that are often subordinated in situations of social and economic change brought about by promises of development (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002; Curry and Koczberski 2012; A Ploeg 2013).

Following the above discussion, I briefly reconstruct how the BFN was formed and explicate some of the counter-practices, local adaptations, and experimentation they have employed to enhance self-reliance and local production of food. In a critical theoretical sense, this local experimentation goes some way toward helping to challenge the dominant narrative in political economy and mainstream development: that the origins

and sources of "progress and agricultural development" are exogenous to locales like Solomon Islands, with local "traditional" practices and knowledge framed as impediments to growth and productivity (J D van der Ploeg 2014, 1003). I conclude by suggesting that the alternatives posited by the BFN entail possibilities and practices that contrast with most of the other participatory development or agricultural extension strategies found in Solomon Islands.

Contradictions of Development: Reasons for the Emergence of the Bushmen Farming Network

"Bushmen" is a common term used in Malaita to denote people who live "up bush," are generally self-sufficient, and draw their livelihoods from subsistence agriculture. However, because the BFN encourages conceiving and practicing development and agriculture from a different perspective, group members do not limit their work spatially to "bush people." Not limiting the group spatially was also apparent in their choosing a name for the group that was not Kwara'ae in origin. Although the BFN's ideas, epistemologies of development, and kastom are drawn from the culture of Kwara'ae (which is the largest linguistic group in Solomon Islands), naming the group in Kwara'ae would have, so the thinking went, limited the group to a single place and community. Echoing this was the rejection of the name Malaita Farming Network, as this would have limited the perspective to one province, whereas the ideals of "bushpeople" are found all over Solomon Islands.[5]

Although the Bushmen's name suggests people living far from human settlements, the core of the group lives in Central Kwara'ae constituency, in the small villages of Gwaidadae, Namobaula, Gwaisusuru, Kwanasia, and Fulifo'oa, all of which are on Faibusia clan land. These villages, while inland and generally accessed only on foot along muddy paths and heavily degraded dirt roads, are actually not far from the North Road that, weather permitting, connects the provincial capital of Auki to Northern Malaita or to the large village of Kilusikwalo that sits beside the road. From Kilusikwalo, which is twenty to thirty minutes' walk from the majority of the Bushmen's villages, there is regular transport to Auki, five kilometers away. In Auki, there is a daily market, shops, a telecommunications office, a post office, banks, and daily ferries and cargo ships to the nation's capital, Honiara. Thus, people (especially young people) have constant access to the "bright lights" of Auki, and it is also common for

people to travel to Honiara to look for employment, visit relatives, or continue their education.

With this proximity to Auki and the convenience of traveling to Honiara, social and environmental changes have been taking place in Central Kwara'ae in Malaita. These changes have been expressed by indigenous elders in terms of people (especially young people) continuing to turn toward a tua malafaka'anga, meaning a life or living in imitation of the white man—a life becoming ever more determined by living (and eating) with money (Gegeo 1998, 300, 306, 292). While this turn to "living in imitation of the white man" is certainly not a new thing in Solomon Islands, there is a feeling among some people that both population density and the pace of change are increasing and that communities are not only losing agricultural and valuable cultural knowledge at a rapid pace but also an appreciation of who they are and where they came from.

Combined with this turn is a process of urbanization in provinces like Malaita, with its capital, Auki, experiencing a dramatic 11.6 percent increase in annual urban growth rate; more than five thousand people are now classed as "urban dwellers" in the province (SIG 2013, xxi, 16, 17). As in other Pacific Island countries where people migrate to urban and peri-urban areas to access employment, education, and health services, Auki and its surroundings are rapidly expanding as people move to be closer to the meager services that it offers. As a consequence, large nearby villages like Kilusikwalo also have rapidly expanding populations. Thus, there is a fear that this large and important village (which features a well-known primary and high school) will seek more land for housing and gardens, putting further pressure on area resources. As Kilusikwalo was founded as a South Sea Evangelical Church "mission" village in the 1950s on Faibusia clan customary land, most people living there come from other places across Malaita, meaning their "traditional" gardening lands are elsewhere; thus, they need permission to garden on other clans' customary land.[6] This situation has added to local tensions, with some subclans within the Faibusia asking whether customary land can be made available for sale.[7] These intra-clan inquiries mostly stem from some Faibusia wanting to commodify land to take advantage of its location close to Auki in order to generate some short-term cash-earning opportunities. The BFN, who have members from all of the Faibusia subclans, oppose the commodification of land on kastom grounds. The BFN's emergence in a location near epicenters of rising population suggests that some people are acutely aware of the implications of such an increase in population

bundled together with the already declining productivity of garden lands. Furthermore, the pressure on locations such as these will become more commonplace as urbanization continues. In short, the fate of these locations is therefore a type of barometer not only for the pressures and implications of "development" but also for the types of responses that may become more prevalent as pressures intensify and people turn to holding on to the resources and practices they already have to help them navigate and adapt to emerging socioeconomic and cultural challenges brought on by a global neoliberal development project (Ratuva 2014, 46) as well as by colonialism and its legacies.

Having access to garden land is important because, despite ongoing urbanization, only 12 percent of Malaitan households rely on wages from income or salary through the formal sector (SIG 2013, 113). This means that most Malaitans are "subsistence farmers relying on traditional agriculture [swidden/shifting cultivation] for both livelihoods and cash income" (MPG 2013, 12). The significance of this stress on resources also becomes apparent once we appreciate that, in terms of population, Malaita is the biggest province, with 137,596 inhabitants or about 27 percent of the total population of Solomon Islands (SIG 2013, xxi, 9, xxvi). Malaita also has a high population density, which, at thirty-three people per square kilometer, is almost double the national average.

This population density means that the fallow periods necessary for an efficient shifting cultivation system have decreased markedly (SIG 2010, 4). As fallow periods are a "function of human population density . . . the fewer people who claim rights to a patch of forested land, the longer the average fallow cycle possible throughout that patch" (Foale, Dyer, and Kinch 2016, 18). The shortening of fallow periods and extended cropping periods of an "intensified version of traditional shifting cultivation" (Eldon 2015, 2) have lead to increased land degradation, declining yields, and a higher incidence of pest and disease.

Moreover, declining yields and increasing population density pressure are having the effect of causing intra-clan disputes as some people look to slash and burn bigger areas in order to "lock up" parcels of customary land for future use because, throughout rural Melanesia, rights to parcels of land are created or augmented when labor is expended on that land (Foale, Dyer, and Kinch 2016, 16). Also, while some members of communities and clans want to commodify land in order to sell or lease it, others in the community blame this desire for commodification on people's forgetting the underlying cultural values that keep harmony in communities

and ensure survival through subsistence.[8] Thus, among the subclans that make up the bulk of the BFN's members in Central Kwara'ae, commodification of land for sale or leasing for resource extraction is a salient issue, particularly as simmering disputes over what land should be used and by whom reveal epistemological differences about development and how place-based cultural and economic goals can be achieved (Gegeo 1998, 297–300; Curry 2003; McDougall 2005; Allen 2013b, 172–177). These conflicts and tensions within families and clans have often been connected to the process of development and capitalist transformation in Solomon Islands (Gegeo 1991; Burt 1994) and have had a marked effect on social cohesion—something that nevertheless continues to be valued in small, rural communities (Schwarz and others 2011). In short, from the perspective of some "critical villagers" like the BFN, these land disputes reflect the erosion of social norms and customs that have been an important point of reference in the regulation of society throughout Solomon Islands (Kabutaulaka 2000, 89).

For the BFN, there has been a realization that customary land is under increasing pressure from a number of angles, together with a concern about people's future ability to draw a living from the land in a way that is consistent with cultural values (author fieldnotes, Jan 2015, July 2015). As the BFN president explained, looking up into the hills surrounding the village of Fulifo'oa (author fieldnotes, July 2015):

> One day when you come back there will be none of the trees on the hills and people will have put in gardens but the gardens will be washed away with all of the nutrients because they have cut down the trees or not allowed the soil to "grow back." I worry about how my children will feed their families. Maybe they are supposed to sell the land for "big fast-fast" development and just go to the store to get food or just live on cassava that will grow anywhere.[9]

Thus, the pressures on land and people's access to customary land intersects with wider debates in Pacific Island countries about food (in)security (Plahe, Hawkes, and Ponnamperuma 2013; Allen 2015; Campbell 2015) and nutrition (Pollock 1992; Lowitt and others 2015).

Issues of Food Security and Nutrition: Contradictions and Opportunities

"Food security" is a well-established, long-embedded philosophy for all Pacific Island communities, and food access for Island residents has long

been an essential element in well-being, along with ties to land.[10] However, food security in Solomon Islands, as in other parts of the Pacific, is intrinsically linked to the production and availability of subsistence foods that flow through social networks of indigenous exchange—activities that are concerned with the maintenance of personal and group relations rather than conceived solely in terms of the accumulation of wealth and creation of capital value through agriculture (C Macpherson 1999; Curry 2003; Barclay and Kinch 2013; Curry and Koczberski 2013). A majority of rural Melanesians support themselves through the production of staple foods, and their "commercial orientation" is selling surplus produce in local markets—meaning that, for many rural Melanesians, generating social returns outweighs profit motives. For instance, in the Fiu Community Rice Project in West Kwara'ae in Malaita, Simon Baete found that the accumulation of wealth to enable the improvement of an individual's livelihood or quality of life was not the dominant priority for most villagers' agricultural production; rather, having enough to share among family and kin and being able to participate in social events were more important goals (2012, 96).

Food security also has deep ties to the customary lands on which subsistence foods are produced. Recent evidence from Simon Feeny, Lachlan McDonald, and Alberto Posso (2014) highlights that, in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, good access to land to grow food, as well as strong family and clan-based ties to land, provide not only a crucial mechanism of resilience but are also vital for local people's happiness. These researchers also found that the association between happiness and the strong cultural connections that flow through land is rooted in a strongly felt sense "of belonging stemming from the fact these lands have been passed from generation to generation" (Feeny, McDonald, and Posso 2014, 454). In short, the production of subsistence foods and the sharing of these are more than symbolic of social relations throughout many Pacific Island countries (Connell 2015, 1300), including Solomon Islands. Food encompasses a range of cultural, social, and spiritual values that move it beyond being merely something to satisfy a biological function or a commodity to satisfy a global market (Campbell 2015, 1315).

However, in Solomon Islands, like in other parts of the world, there is also a growing reliance on nonlocal food sources that intersects with different cultural and social constellations as consumer preferences of many people (both urban and rural) are turning toward store-bought packaged and processed food (Connell 2013). Indeed, Simon Feeny and May Miller-Dawkins argued that in rural areas in Pacific Island countries, 50 percent

of household expenditure is on food (2014, 2). Their findings correlate with other research showing that even in places like Solomon Islands, where subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture dominates, people consume a blend of food from the garden with the increasing amounts of store-bought food (McDonald, Naidu, and Mohanty 2014, 117).

A growing reliance on nonlocal food sources also adversely affects local material living conditions as people become more exposed to a volatile global market system. Quite simply, the increase of store-bought food also means increased exposure to food price hikes (Feeny and Miller-Dawkins 2014, 10). The example of rice in Solomon Islands is pertinent, as rice, which is mostly imported from Australia or Taiwan, has become a staple, is present in most meals, and constitutes a major expenditure for most families. This pattern is reflected in all provinces in Solomon Islands, which spend approximately half their household food consumption budget on cereal products, the major one being rice (SIG 2006, 6). Rural areas also spend almost double the amount on cereals compared to urban areas (SIG 2010, 5). It is estimated the yearly consumption of rice per person in Solomon Islands is 100 kilograms. Reliance on rice contributes greatly to Solomon Islands having a 35–44 percent dependency on imported foods (calculated as food imports being a percentage of total food expenditure); this is a high figure considering the large incidence of subsistence and semi-subsistence livelihoods (Parks, Abbot, and Wilkinson 2009, 17). In 2013, rice imports were approximately 52,000 tonnes (metric tons), compared to 40,000 in 2012, and the price of rice has been on the increase since 1987 (Garnevska, Gray, and Baete 2013, 52).

The significance of this consumption pattern was brought home to me when Isaac, a BFN member, related an anecdote about children refusing to go to school if they did not get rice at breakfast and how they complained that more traditional crops like taro, yam, and pana did not fill them up and left them hungry. Sitting in the shade outside his house in Kwanasia after a morning of cleaning up some gardens, he called over his two small children and asked whether they preferred to eat taro and kumara (sweet potato) or rice. A little embarrassed about being asked about their consumption habits in front of an araikwao (white man), they mumbled, "Rice," and ran away to continue their game. Isaac further explained, "They have even told me that taro and yam is not 'their' food, like it comes from somewhere else; it is like they are the foreign foods now" (author fieldnotes, July 2015). Further tying this growing dependence into wider development challenges, global food price inflations had a major

effect on food prices in Solomon Islands (McMichael 2013). For example, the price of food increased 53 percent between 2005 and 2010, and these increases especially affected imported foods like rice, flour, and the ubiquitous instant noodles, found in every village store (Anderson, Thilsted, and Schwarz 2013, 7). Although the cost of imported foodstuffs was not the primary motivating factor in the establishment of the BFN, concern over cost has become more prominent with the growing effects of climate change (longer dry periods, out of season cyclones, and heavier storms), meaning that fi'olo'anga or times of low food supply from gardens have become more widespread, increasing dependency on imported foodstuffs. As Austin and Joyce, BFN members in Kwanasia, recalled (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016):

> Last year, people's gardens were not very good as it was dry and then we had big storms, which washed a lot away. Because there was more demand for rice, the shops put the prices up and people were always looking for money to buy it. We were better off as we had our "Bushmen Gardens" that could cope better. Some people saw this, asked questions and began to use some of the methods as well. Now, being Bushmen they do not spend as much money on buying food and have more to share with people too.

A growing dependence on imported foodstuffs also has negative implications for health. Some villagers, including BFN members, see the gradual abandonment of a more locally grown diet and the ease of store-bought foods as undermining indigenous concepts of a balanced diet (expressed in Kwara'ae as adami'anga), leading to a reliance on energy-dense foods and contributing to high rates of obesity and noncommunicable diseases like diabetes and heart disease (WHO 2010; Anderson, Thilsted, and Schwarz 2013, 9–12).[11] In a recent study of the agriculture-nutrition nexus in Solomon Islands, it was found to be common for people to sell more nutritious fruit, vegetables, and other crops in order to purchase imported carbohydrates like rice and instant noodles, which are generally of a low nutritional quality. Poorer dietary intake is compounded by the growing availability of sugar-rich beverages and highly processed snack foods (Becker, Joshua, and Tavoa 2016, 5). BFN members recognize the lure of such store-bought treats. As Ju-Ju, one of the teenage members of the Bushmen, explained one morning while walking between Gwaidadae and Gwaisusuru, "I did not think about it before [the BFN] but it's crazy to go to the market with bananas and taro just to get money to buy rice, noodles, and biscuits" (author fieldnotes, Oct 2014).

Thus far, I have broadly discussed some of the issues and negative implications of the wider "development project" (McMichael 2012, 46). This background helps to explain the emergence of a group like the BFN and to highlight how they are an example of pushback against such contradictions that undermine social values. The following section provides a more in-depth look at the BFN to elucidate how groups adopt culturally based mechanisms that help them counter relations of deprivation connected with wider disempowering effects of mainstream development. I also illustrate how BFN activities can be considered as substantive alternative practices to more mainstream, community-led antipoverty and "development" programs.

Counter Practices to Live Other-Wise: The Case of the Bushmen Farming Network

After becoming aware of the BFN in 2014 while doing doctoral fieldwork in Central Kwara'ae, I arranged to meet Casper Saefo'oa, the president and lead farmer of the BFN, in the village of Fulifo'oa, where he lived. Sitting in his large, thatched-roofed, dirt-floored kitchen along with assorted family members, I asked him about gwaumauri, a concept I had read about in the work of noted Kwara'ae academic David Welchman Gegeo, who hails from a village not far from Fulifo'oa. Gegeo suggested gwaumauri is the indigenous Kwara'ae conception of the "good life" and the "principle objective of rural development for rural Kwara'ae" (1998, 298). Furthermore, Gegeo argued, the practices that constitute gwaumauri are at odds with mainstream approaches to development (1998, 300).[12] I wanted to know if this concept informed the work the BFN was undertaking. Saefo'oa, knowing my Kwara'ae was limited, thought about this for a while, translating his answer from that language into Solomons Pijin (which I translate to English here): "People have forgotten about gwaumauri'anga. When we do our gardens and help each other, we feel gwaumauri. When we work hard and use our own ideas, we feel gwaumauri and we want to try and get this feeling back. Gwaumauri dies because people lean [become dependent] on outside knowledge and money." This brought murmurs of affirmation from around the kitchen. Saefo'oa then stated more emphatically, "We do not want to be like little bird who waits for his mother to give him kai-kai [food]. This is not our falafala [kastom]" (author fieldnotes, Oct 2014).

Later on in that discussion, Saefo'oa also reflected on how thinking

about the dynamic recovering of local epistemologies (although he himself would not have phrased it like this) through small-scale agriculture had made him reflect on what he had learned from his father and grandfather (who themselves were agricultural leaders in the Faibusia clan). He insisted that the shifting cultivation technique and how it is practiced now is certainly not "traditional" and has been influenced by colonial relations through the plantation system (author fieldnotes, Oct 2014). That is, while a type of shifting cultivation has been used since time immemorial on Malaita, it was not on the same scale or pace that came after the Malaitans, who, as the main labor force in colonial Solomon Islands, came back to the island after working on plantations.[13] After returning, they began to clear bigger areas and cut down everything, as this was the normal practice on plantations. In other words, this expansion and intensification of shifting cultivation and no-input agriculture was transplanted through the colonial operations of the British protectorate. Soon, people began forgetting the older method, which was much smaller in scale, what the Bushmen call "easy moving," based on ecological replenishment, and left some vegetation standing (ie, trees and plants that repelled pests and kept gardens safe from sorcery). Added population and food security pressures further weaken the already devalued practices and knowledge associated with older systems of agriculture that employ a more sustainable approach based on ecological relations.

Intersecting with Saefo'oa's reflections on "traditional" agricultural practices was a meeting with an American soil scientist, Jon Eldon, who has since then formed a lasting relationship with the BFN.[14] Eldon had first come to Malaita in 2012 to try and put together a pilot food security assessment in Northern Malaita for his doctorate. At the completion of the northern part of his studies, he wanted to set up some field trials with the large and well-known Honiara-based nongovernmental organization Kastom Gaden Association (KGA). That group advised him to meet a contact at the KGA-connected Guanafiu Farmer School, which implemented alternative agricultural practices such as contour farming and cover cropping. However, because he arrived in Auki late in the day, transport was difficult to find, so Eldon went into a small photocopy shop seeking information and possibly an Internet connection. The owner of the shop was Solomon Alufo'oa, who was a BFN member. Hearing what Eldon had been doing in the north and where he wanted to go, Solomon invited him to stay with his family in Gwaidadae that night and to look for transport the following day. At the village, Eldon met Casper Saefo'oa and, although

language difficulties existed, they both understood soil. Using props like betel nuts, the "science" behind what the smallholder farmers did in their no-input farming emerged—that is, spreading a thin layer of fertile soil atop low-fertility clay and burning vegetative debris to create fire ash in order to temporarily neutralize soil acidity and make the limited nutrients more accessible to plants. Subsequently, a group of interested farmers from the community also traveled to the Guanafiu Farmer School and got more ideas and materials, like the fast-growing vetiver grass that is planted as borders and then regularly cut to add nutrients to what have come to be known colloquially as Bushmen Gardens.[15]

A few farmers started to experiment, employing a variety of locally adapted techniques such as making raised beds; using charcoal, copra ash, and river sand to make the soil fertile; and utilizing a "slash and mulch" system whereby cut vegetation is placed in rows to decompose (Eldon 2014). Initially, the majority of the gardens where farmers tried the new techniques were "sup-sup" gardens or smaller kitchen gardens, which are located nearer the family house than larger gardens, which have had to move farther and farther "up bush" to access better, less degraded soil. The kitchen-garden planting was done for two reasons. First, as explained by Casper Saefo'oa, "We wanted to do things 'little by little' and be easy [slow] moving to prove to ourselves it would work" (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016). This illustrated to the gardeners that, like most rural dwellers, they were interested in testing innovations but did not want to make bigger investments of labor and resources until the smaller-scale tests showed success and sustainability (Warren 2006, 14). Second, "sup-sup" gardens have become increasingly important in the production and consumption patterns in Solomon Islands as populations have risen and yield has dropped in larger gardens "up bush." Furthermore, as more people were becoming "urbanized" in the area, it was thought that more productive kitchen gardens might also help prevent the spread onto already stressed customary land.

In proving to themselves that their locally adapted techniques worked, the Bushmen also wanted to show others that they as ordinary villagers could succeed and require no special outside knowledge or extravagant equipment. As Austin, one of the BFN members in Kwanasia, said about their techniques, "It's easy, and any villager can do it if they want to" (author fieldnotes, Oct 2014)—meaning that it is understood from the local perspective both practically and culturally.

This "little by little, easy moving," incremental approach also ensures

that projects remain within rural villagers' abilities to manage and are not out of reach or beyond their "epistemic horizons."[16] Drawing on David Gegeo and Karen Watson-Gegeo's work on Kwara'ae epistemology, the "little by little" incremental practice-based strategy was also aligned with indigenous epistemology; as they argued for rural villagers, "learning involves doing and drawing theoretical abstractions from the doing" (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002, 398) and also taking time to digest and rework the information to suit local conditions before continuing or expanding. Furthermore, this incremental approach also helps to guard against what Gegeo described as the alienation rural villagers sometimes feel when development activities and projects are driven mainly by Anglo-European knowledge and values, as well as the "mechanical" participation and less than optimal outcomes that result from such participation (1998, 308).

Other-Wise Practices and Participatory Development

This incremental approach and the need to prove to themselves that something works also differs from most of the community development projects and agricultural extension projects that BFN members were aware of or had been involved in. Generally, these well-intentioned projects ask people to commit to what are often ill-defined, long-term plans of action for uncertain returns that time and again leave participants worse off in terms of food availability. Experience with such projects has helped shape how the BFN conceptualize participation and also implement their practices.

For example, employing a "doing while talking" approach contrasts with most of the participatory development or agricultural extension strategies found in Solomon Islands. These for the most part revolve around workshops, meetings, and often the handing out of manuals explaining gardening techniques. At this stage, the Bushmen have made a conscious decision not to publish any pamphlets or manuals, as, in their experience, written material passed out in such settings is often not used by participants and acts as a substitute for actually working to learn. As previously noted, for most rural Solomon Islanders, understanding (critical reflection) comes from doing (practice) and experiences, not the other way around. Moreover, manuals can also constrain local adaptations, as rural villagers try to copy or imitate the "experts." The BFN, however, emphasize local adaptations and encourage people not just to copy or imitate. They have found that local experimentation and adaptation not only give substan-

tive "ownership" to local participants but are also vital to the long-term sustainability of the agricultural interventions. Finding what works best for themselves, in both the cultural and material sense, is of paramount importance because the majority of projects and initiatives observed or participated in by "critical villagers" do not come from the local wellspring but from outsiders—and they have failed. On a broader scale, such failures have caused both economic and social distress, further embedding the feeling that indigenous cultures and ideas in Solomon Islands are worthless and not suitable for "development" (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001, 77).

Another issue pertaining to the failure of development projects throughout Melanesia is the enduring romanticization of "communal" structures within villages (Schoeffel 1997). This romanticization attaches an exemplary status to "traditional" communities, as they are seen to be "free from greed, self seeking treachery and disloyalty" (Hooper 2000, 5). Obviously, however, this is not the case, and greed and self-seeking behaviors are often exacerbated by development (Foale 2001, 48–49). In short, the notion of "community" and how it is used with development in mind generally entails problems of elite capture, with people who manage the projects not having the skills or technical know-how to do so and also putting their interests ahead of those of the community. Indigenous values of cooperative and collaborative labor for the whole village are often coopted and deployed in rural Solomon Islands as a strategy to further some individuals' own interests as they take control of the project (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002, 390–391). Recognizing this issue, Bushmen thus emphasize their gardens are not "community gardens"; rather, the day-to-day duties around managing a particular garden are looked after by each separate BFN member and their family, who can then call on others for labor and advice. This assistance is generally not contributed in a formal sense (ie, through a schedule or timetable) but is often arranged through word of mouth when people are walking through villages, at the market in Auki, or before or after church services. Not having "community gardens" is therefore intended to bolster talau'anga, which Gegeo described as "counting on one's own potential and ability within the context and as a supporter of community interdependence" (1994, 301). This attitude is evidenced in how Bushmen operate. For instance, as tools are in short supply, they are shared among members, something that sometimes causes tensions as some rural villagers increasingly see "community" development projects as a conduit for resources (Cox 2009).[17] As female members

Joyce and Rose explained, while sitting on the verandah outside Joyce's small thatched-roof house in Kwanasia (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016):

> When people realize they are not going to get anything—not even a workshop where they get a "sitting" fee or free food—they are not interested. They might even come to where a garden is being dug in a village because they think they will walk away with shovels, wheelbarrows and scissors (pruning shears) but we do not have enough of these anyway and they are shared between members. Even when Casper [the president] goes to South Malaita, he takes tools and brings them back as World Vision does not provide them to the communities there. So when he goes South we have less tools here to share.

However, the idea of participation espoused by the Bushmen fits into the incremental approach and, they argue, helps guard against some of the jealousy and derogatory comments that come with some villagers seeing others as profiting from development projects and failing to uphold cultural values. As Casper Saefo'oa suggested (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016):

> Some people see araikwao (white) researchers come to see us and they think we are getting lots of money but most people see us being "easy moving" and helping each other and this stops them being jealous. When we started people would say that we "ate rubbish" because we used scraps on our gardens because they were jealous but we do not hear that so much anymore. Some people ask how they can join; they think there is a membership fee but you become a Bushmen by working hard and making your soil more fertile and anyone can do that.

The BFN are also acutely aware of larger agriculture and development projects that have failed in the surrounding area as well as the imagined promises of development that have not come to fruition, and this has also influenced their modes of practice and participation.[18]

Two recent, larger, less-than-successful agricultural development projects the BFN members are cognizant of are the Fiu Community Rice Project, which disbanded in 2010, and the Japanese-funded Asia Pacific Sustainable Development (APSD) rural training center at Gwaigeo, which, after suspending operations for two years, resumed in October 2014.[19]

It is not my intention to go into the full details of those projects here, as the Fiu Community Rice Project has been investigated in detail by Simon Baete (2012) and Elena Garnevska, David Gray, and Baete (2013). However, broadly speaking, these projects were more aligned to a market-orientated approach to agriculture and development, wherein smallholders specialized in one crop—rice—while implicitly learning the skills and

attitudes that could be transferred to other, larger, commercially oriented ventures. This being the case, these projects needed many inputs including fertilizers and pesticides, rice-processing equipment, machinery such as tractors, and specialized knowledge. Thus, when something broke down or was not delivered by the extension services associated with the projects, operations ground to a halt, leading to crop failures and farmers being discouraged from continuing. The projects' continuing operation was thus dependent on knowledge and resources that were not readily available. Furthermore, local knowledge was not sought in the implementation of these undertakings. In the APSD project, what is known to be some of the most nutrient-rich soil on Malaita was removed from the alluvial plains in order to make the paddies to grow rice. The rice was planted in the extremely acidic soil underneath, which, of course, meant the rice crop failed. A further problem was that the network of ditches dug around the paddies to alleviate the natural flooding had no outlet. As Casper Saefo'oa explained to Jon Eldon after visiting the APSD site (and Eldon subsequently relayed to me via email, 19 Jan 2015):

> Give me a shovel and ten minutes and I'd dig a ditch from the ditch network to the river and drain the entire area. Then I'd push all the good soil back into the holes [they had dug for rice] and go back to growing taro, kumara and yams—things we already know how to grow and [pointing to a rusty and broken down excavator] don't need these things for. This is the best soil on the island but these people don't know how to farm.

Similarly, the failure of the Fiu Community Rice Project saw farmers associated with it worse off afterward in terms of food availability and income, as they had put most of their efforts into the rice crop and thus neglected their other gardens (Baete 2012; Garnevska, Gray, and Baete 2013). Reflecting on such development failures and how the motivations behind them contrasted with becoming more self-reliant, the members of the Bushmen Farming Network have made a conscious decision to only use resources that are easily available. Two examples illustrate this. First, in creating their small raised beds near family homes or in larger plots, the organic material the BFN use—whether it is leaves, food scraps, or other vegetation—is sourced in their communities. The same can be said of the palm fronds that cover the decomposing organic material and the copra ash (which comes from the community copra dryer in Namobaula), pig manure, and river sand, although the sand sometimes has to be carried for up to two kilometers to gardens in twenty-kilo bags along steep and

often slippery paths. Using what is readily and locally available is repeatedly emphasized to farmers who participate in a garden being dug in an interested village. For instance, at the Auki Correctional Centre, where the BFN have been working with inmates since early 2016 on organic gardens within the facility, an inmate asked as he worked beside members,[20] "I come from coastal Northern Malaita and what if I can't find some of the materials we are using today? This is just what happens, we learn things we can't use when we get back home" (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016).

This theme was picked up by some of the other men as well, including an inmate from Western Province. Their questions led to a discussion about what could be substituted for what (ie, if you did not have vetiver grass, you can just use old logs, rocks, or overturned coconut husks for garden borders; if you did not have access to pig manure, you can use chicken manure or find trees where birds roost and collect the droppings; and if you were on a sand island, then coconuts could be cut in half and put together tightly at the base of the dug garden to form a foundation and nutrient barrier so that earth and other material organic materials could be placed on top) and how vital local adaptations were (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016). The guards, who had also taken an active role in the digging of the gardens, were then asked what happened to the food scraps from the prison and whether they could be collected and used on the gardens that were being prepared to be planted in three months' time. That suggestion was implemented very quickly and is now an important source of soil nutrition in the prison (Jimmy Aega, Commander Auki Correctional Facility, pers comm, 25 June 2016).

Agricultural Diversity, Networks, and Living Other-Wise

Agricultural biodiversity and the maintenance of a variety of crops have always been at the heart of traditional agricultural systems in Pacific Island countries (Thaman, Meleisea, and Makasiale 2002). For instance, for the BFN, when you look at gardens you need to see everything you want inside, and as Davidson, a member in Kwanasia, said, "It is not good to have only one thing in your basket" (author fieldnotes, Oct 2014). This idea is part of an indigenous system of risk management, which ensures that failure of any one particular crop does not mean total failure (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002, 389); for people who rely on and turn to their gardens when price shocks and other calamities occur, gardens serve as a key source of resilience in Melanesian countries (Feeny and Miller-Dawkins 2014, 13).

For instance, during "the tensions" of 1998–2003, when the formal economy of Solomon Islands ground to a halt, the subsistence system and "custom economy" helped to shield much of the population from the effects of the crisis (Moore 2008, 387). Similarly, Matthew Allen has suggested that such systems also ensure that Melanesian countries are relatively food secure compared to Polynesian and Micronesian countries (Allen 2015).

However, it has been recognized that throughout Pacific Island countries, the diversity of crops have been reduced as population increases have put more pressure on limited spaces of arable land and as shortened fallow periods have reduced soil fertility and yields (Campbell 2015, 1318). As John Campbell argued, this has meant the replacement of traditional crops like yam and taro—those having higher soil and labor requirements—with the nontraditional cassava, which does not have the same requirements (2015, 1318). Kumara is another root crop now treated as a staple, given its quicker yield and lower labor input per unit of production compared to the traditional root-crop staples. Encouragingly, this replacement of traditional crops has been recognized by the United Nations Development Project, which has recently introduced a program in Solomon Islands to grow large amounts of yam and taro at selected sites in order to distribute them to farmers in selected provinces, though not at this stage in Malaita (UNDP 2014).

Practically, and through their own efforts, the BFN are also engaged in similar efforts through sourcing varieties of yams and taro through their expanding networks in other parts of Malaita.[21] Taro is a particular case in point, and it is a crop that the BFN have focused on in their short existence. Taro—one of the original farming crops of Melanesia, where it is thought to have been domesticated from wild sources—has a higher level of cultural significance than root crops of a more recent arrival like kumara or pana (Lebot, Simeoni, and Jackson 2001). It is a high-status crop that has a central role in rural peoples' cultural identity. For example, taro can be seen as symbolic of wealth, status, and power and is commonly presented at wedding and funerary feasts as such (KGA 2016).

Prior to the Bushmen's initiative, taro had not grown in the heavily populated areas in Central Kwara'ae for many decades because of a lack of soil fertility and decreasing fallow rotations. Therefore, people's taro plots were farther "up bush"—sometimes two or more hours' walk away from villages—in mature secondary forests, where soil fertility was highest because of longer fallow periods. The distances to plots obviously add to the labor requirements to grow taro and can also have adverse health

effects on children, if, for example, women are looking after gardens and must spend long periods getting to and from them, sometimes leaving infants back in the village with inadequate and irregular meals (KGA 2016).

Growing taro was a challenge for the Bushmen and also a perfect test for their soil management system, as well as an opportunity to reinvigorate some of the complex and diverse kastom knowledge about cultivating it. From the BFN's perspective, the loss of some of this knowledge is one of the downsides to a shift away from crops like taro and yam. This being the case, the "rules" around planting taro (eg, the special way to hold the taro, what direction it should face, and what to say to it when planting it) are emphasized during the digging and maintenance of taro gardens. Recounting digging a taro garden in Kwanasia where these "rules" were explained and demonstrated, Ju-Ju, a younger member, said, "It is important to know the kastom practices around planting as it teaches us who we are. We are very lucky that Casper still knows and practices it. Now I know that sometimes when our crops fail, it might be because we have not planted them in the kastom way" (author fieldnotes, July 2015). To make the task even more difficult, Casper Saefo'oa and his sons, who had been putting their new system to the test on their other garden land, set about cultivating taro in some of the most infertile soil in the area, an old soccer and volleyball court where years of activity had "compacted the already infertile clay to the point where even pioneer plant species couldn't become established and a spade couldn't penetrate more than an inch" (Eldon 2014). As Jon Eldon explained:

> To convert this field into a taro garden was about as audacious as jackhammering the center lane of a Los Angeles freeway to plant an orange grove. . . . When I asked Casper why he chose this place, he said that he was tired of walking to distant fertile fields and, given the results he'd seen from his new practices, he didn't see why he couldn't grow whatever he wanted wherever he wanted to. As he puts it—and this is something that I have now heard echoed in the area—he doesn't need to go find fertile soil anymore, all he needs now is land and he can make it fertile. (Eldon 2014)

The reintroduction and greater availability of taro has not only allowed people to bring it to dinner plates on a more regular basis but also to once again incorporate it in the exchange networks that strengthen social bonds and relations through redistribution. As female BFN member Hellen commented, "When I go east to Kwai Island or Ngonosila

Island or even to Honiara to visit relatives and I have taro, I will always take a bag. In Honiara they think we are rich as taro in Honiara is considered a 'rich man's food' because of the high price" (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016).

Such networks of exchange and mutual support have long been found throughout the Pacific (Ratuva 2014), and in Solomon Islands, "bush" people and the "salt water" people of the coast have always engaged in trade and exchange (Moore 2007; Akin 2013). Furthermore, these networks also often took place between islands—a point made by Epeli Hau'ofa (1994) and Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (2015), who stressed that both the intra- and interisland networks in Melanesia and the complex systems of trade, exchange, and relationships of sharing and reciprocity that underpinned them were, and often still are, misunderstood and underestimated by outsiders. As previously noted, networks and kinship obligations have also played an integral role in food security. These networks, although under increasing pressure from some of the issues outlined above, engender crop diversity and resilient agroecosystems and allow for the sharing of surplus, which allows communities to be shielded somewhat in times of low food availability caused by extreme weather events and price hikes (Campbell 2015, 1318). In other words, these networks help to bolster the foundations of traditional agrosystems that are embedded in local social relations while also "providing a protective cushion to fall back on against poverty and various other negative impacts of the market economy" (Ratuva 2014, 49). Strengthening existing networks but also creating new networks therefore has interrelated ecological, sociocultural, and economic significance.[22] Practically speaking, then, solidifying and extending networks aids in systematically improving resources by, for example, improving soil fertility, selecting suitable plants for higher yields, as well as, crucially, obtaining more knowledge (J D van der Ploeg 2014, 1008).[23] Through both informal and more formal networks, farmer knowledge is valued as is agricultural biodiversity (McMichael 2014, 48) and, importantly, this can "enable people to live within the constraints of their environment in the long-term, without the need for catastrophic learning in the event of major resource depletion" (Pretty and others 2009, 104).

Conclusion

Visions of development in Melanesia and elsewhere in the Pacific are often significantly different at the level of macroeconomics and macro-politics

compared to that of rural communities (Hau'ofa 1994, 148). This difference is crucial because, as Gegeo (1998), Moore (2007, 227–231), and Allen (2013b, 175) argued in the case of Malaita, agricultural development (and development more generally) will only succeed if it is informed by "Malaitan epistemologies of rural development" (Allen 2013b, 175). Often these epistemologies do not reflect the normative undercarriage of mainstream institutional thinking on agriculture and development.

In Solomon Islands, the mainstream thinking on agriculture and development is reflected in the high priority accorded to modernizing agricultural development by the Solomon Islands government. Modernization is envisaged to occur through developing the rice industry and increasing palm oil exports (SIG 2015, 22, 23, 28). Other prominent development initiatives include Phase Two of Solomon Islands Rural Development Project (RDP II), which aims to stimulate linkages between the private sector and smallholders through inputs, planting materials, and training to help smallholders be more productive. These initiatives occur against the backdrop of wide recognition that the "traditional farming system still provides a relatively high level of food security" (SIG 2010, 5).[24] Thus, the government acknowledges that the subsistence and semi-subsistence sector should be strengthened and that rural dwellers can help prevent national-scale hunger and malnutrition (SIG 2010, 8). One way this could be achieved is by actually strengthening "traditional" farming systems and their alternative and alter-native values by encouraging local communities to play an active role in realigning and reinvigorating their food systems, strengthening social relations of exchange, and further prioritizing local production and consumption to help reduce dependency on a volatile global market system. However, these other-wise practices and values are not recognized as "successful" agricultural practices for smallholders in initiatives like RDP II, which will be measured by how many agribusiness partnerships are established and how many areas increased under "improved" farming practices through such partnerships (IFAD 2015, 4). "Success" and "productivity" in relation to RDP II (and other initiatives to transform agriculture in Solomon Islands) are conceived from a more market-driven perspective, and gauging motivations to increase production may not correspond to indigenously defined values to generate social returns.

Despite this lack of top-down support, groups such as the Bushmen Farming Network continue to carve out space for a political project of alter-development, however small, where possibilities and potentials are

conceived, created, and reinvigorated as "local communities . . . actively negotiate and strategise . . . with global forms and processes . . . to meet local needs" (Kabutaulaka 2008, 239). These spaces of hope whereby communities look to ensure food security and local understandings of development and agriculture are of great necessity in Solomon Islands. This is because rapid urban population growth, shortened fallow periods, and an increasing reliance on imported food have weakened local food security while also putting pressure on the cultural logics that underpin it. Furthermore, less than 16 percent of people receive agricultural outreach from either the government or larger nongovernmental organization programs (Becker, Joshua, and Tavoa 2016, 5), meaning that local groups like the BFN can reach people who often miss out.

Thus, it is hoped that practical alternatives like the Bushmen Farming Network and its emphasis on social values of exchange and local adaptations are made more visible and substantively utilized by government and donors alike as they try to, for instance, strengthen UNDP programs such as Strongem Waka lo Community fo Kaikai: Resilience and Agriculture and Food Security in Solomon Islands. Beyond this, however, it is hoped that the Bushmen Farming Network continues to live other-wise and move forward according to their own definition of progress because, as Solomon Islanders and the Bushmen Farming Network have learned, "development does not necessarily bring gwaumauri'anga" (Moore 2008, 401).

* * *

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Notes

1 I note, following LiPuma 1998, that both Western and Melanesian constructions of identity and personhood have elements of the individual and of social relations of sharing, obligation, and reciprocity.

2 For example, it is estimated that the equivalent retail value of subsistence food production in Solomon Islands is approximately half of the annual gross domestic product (Bourke and others 2006, 24) and that only 1 percent of households grow crops for the sole purpose of selling (SIG 2013).

3 "Falafala" is the Kwara'ae term for culture and kastom, the knowledge that, although being passed down from one generation to another, is constantly being modified. Many Kwara'ae use the terms "kastom" and "falafala" interchangeably.

4 I take the term "critical villager" from Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 2013.

5 This information was drawn from Jon Eldon (pers comm, 25 Jan 2016), who was present at some of the discussions surrounding the naming of the group.

6 Approximately 90 percent of land on Malaita is designated as being under customary land management (MPG 2013, 14).

7 The Faibusia are made up of four subclans, each with its own boundaries within broader Faibusia land.

8 I am not suggesting land disputes in Malaita are new. As Gegeo stated, "Disputes over the rightful ownership of traditional land have been part of everyday discourse for the people of Malaita island since time immemorial" (1991).

9 Data for this paper were gathered during my doctoral fieldwork through semi-structured interviews with both individuals and small groups in January, July, and October 2014 and January and July 2015 (Spann 2016). These interviews generally occurred over 10–14 days. A postdoctoral visit occurred in January 2016. The majority of the data was gathered in the Central Kwara'ae region, with the village of Gwaidadae being used as a base; however, research trips (accompanied by BFN President Casper Saefo'oa) were also taken to Fo'ondo in Northern Malaita in January 2015 and to Kwai and Ngonosila Islands, off the coast of East Malaita, in July 2015. Sources for BFN activities in South Malaita were compiled through personal communication with Jon Eldon as well as his report for World Vision on the BFN program there (Eldon 2015). This research was complemented with interviews with BFN members in Central Kwara'ae about their activities in the South.

10 Although the term "food security" is not often used by rural people themselves (but rather by nongovernmental organizations, government officials, analysts, and researchers), the understanding of food security that most rural Melanesians do have differs from the mainstream meaning of "feeding the world" and provisioning adequate food supplies through the efficacy of the market.

11 Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo make a similar point (2002, 388).

12 Nine key cultural characteristics form gwaumauri'anga and the Kwara'ae conception of the "good life": alafe'anga (kin love, kindness); aroaro'anga (peace, peacefulness); babato'o'anga (stability); enoeno'anga (humility); fangale'a'anga (sharing); kwaigwale'e'anga (welcoming, comforting, hospitality); kwaima'anga (love, kindness, eros); kwaisare'e'anga (giving without expectation of return); and mamana'anga (truth, honesty, sacred power) (Gegeo 1998, 298). For a reconstruction of gwaumauri'anga and a full list of attributes and terms that constitute it, see Gegeo 1994, 239–240.

13 Regarding the colonial relations in Solomon Islands, see Judith Bennett's seminal *Wealth of the Solomons* (1987); see also Akin 2013; Moore 2007.

14 Even though Jon Eldon's research has taken him far from Malaita to Senegal and The Gambia in West Africa, he still visits Malaita when possible, stays with Bushmen families, and works beside them in their gardens (his last visit being between February and April 2016). In July 2015, he also traveled to South Malaita to conduct an assessment for World Vision on the impact the Bushmen are having in the communities where they work (Eldon 2015).

15 This situation illustrates the fact that while alternative agricultural practices were introduced to Malaita decades ago, they are rarely used or even known about by most people (Eldon 2015, 2).

16 "The Kwara'ae notion of epistemic horizon is that one is motivated to do something when one is able to see far ahead. And in doing, one experiences a growth of knowledge. Seeing distances is itself epistemological because it involves theorizing. Epistemic horizon implies that there is no barrier or cloud between the seer and the horizon, and that everything in between can therefore be seen clearly and is within one's knowledge grasp" (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002, 392).

17 The majority of the Bushmen Farming Network's tools were donated by the Rotary Club of Honiara.

18 For more on the failure of projects in the context of Solomon Islands, see critical accounts by Foale (2001); Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2002); Cox (2009); Allen (2013a, 2013c); and Barclay and Kinch (2013).

19 Recently, the APSD has started to embrace more local techniques and has even brought instructors and students to look at and study some of the Bushmen Gardens.

20 This project received extensive coverage in Solomon Islands' largest newspaper, *Solomon Star*, on 23 February 2016 (Manford 2016). In April 2017, this project was also expanded to include a growing number of juvenile inmates.

21 This is not to say that the BFN discounts the role a crop like cassava plays in local food security concerns. Most members still have cassava gardens, which now have greater yields because of their methods. Increased yields of cassava also mean that more of this crop is available to feed pigs, thus saving on mill run (local pig feed). Cassava also plays a part in Bushmen's informal networks. This was made apparent to me when Hellen, a female BFN member, planted some cassava in Faibusia that grew in three months (it normally takes five to six months). She had gotten this cassava from "someone" in Western Province. One afternoon in January 2016, another female BFN member, Mary, was walking past Hellen's plot en route to her own gardens and was given some "three-month" cassava to plant to feed her pigs. Casper Saefo'oa was also given some to plant the same afternoon, after a session of explaining to Hellen the best way of planting peanuts (author fieldnotes, Jan 2016).

22 Networks and kinship systems are certainly not static but are defined, redefined, created, and recreated within and across language groups and also geographical spaces (Hau'ofa 1994; Moore 2008; Nanau 2011; Ratuva 2014; Campbell 2015).

23 Jan Douwe van der Ploeg was writing not specifically about Solomon Islands but about peasant farmer networks generally.

24 RDP II currently has a budget of US$62.6 million for five years. It is funded by the International Fund For Agricultural Development (IFAD) World Bank; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trading Australia (DFAT); European Union (EU); Solomon Islands Government (SIG); and private benefactors.

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Abstract

Cultural and social relations that are constitutive of alternative ways of conceiving and practicing development exemplify "living other-wise" (Shilliam 2015, 8)

to the central premises of the global development agenda. That is to say, communities who are actively trying to create sustainable alternatives have been contesting the dominant vision of development. In this article, I explore the small, fledgling Bushmen Farming Network of Malaita, Solomon Islands, who question the dominant vision of agricultural development and are attempting to create a small, dynamic, and self-conscious alternative that seeks to enhance self-reliance and local production. My analysis highlights the persistence of social values and relations other-wise and demonstrates their political significance for development. This attempt to organize for living other-wise is an interesting and important response for sustainable development in communities caught between the lure of mainstream development and more socially oriented cultural indigenous values.

KEYWORDS: food security, indigenous epistemology, development, Solomon Islands, sustainable development, smallholder agriculture